

Plagiarism and appropriate attribution: An introduction to APA style

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The *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (2001) has been through several revisions over the decades, most recently in 2001. This guide provides a template and instructions that insure consistency and accuracy for citing journal articles and documents in text. These rules allow the reader to follow sources and conduct further study and investigation, if interest develops in the material. This guide also allows for easy reference to authors in manuscripts, while minimizing the interruptions in the flow of ideas.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without attribution. This usually occurs in one of two ways: someone else's words are used without the writer placing quotation marks around them, and providing a reference to the source of the words, or someone else's ideas are used without giving a reference to the source. Both of these are termed "plagiarism," though the first is usually considered more serious. The *Publication manual* (2001) specifies that three or more words, quoted in succession without attribution, are sufficient to determine that plagiarism has occurred. In order to avoid plagiarism, an author must either use quotation marks or paraphrase material. In both instances, the author must give appropriate credit to the original author.

With the development of the Internet and the commensurate access to literally billions of web pages, student access to information has taken a quantum leap. It is not surprising, then, that many students are learning how easy it is to "cut and paste" a paper together by doing a search on the web, then compiling sections of writing together (or just blatantly copying papers off the web).

How does it work?

If you use someone else's words, quotations marks have to be around them. Then you must cite exactly the source of the words (includes page number, paragraph number for online material when appropriate).

If you paraphrase someone's ideas, you need to make attribution to the source.

For example

Patton (2002) notes that in a qualitative study, "the researcher is the instrument. The credibility... hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork" (p. 14).

One paraphrasing might be:

In qualitative projects, the credibility of the study largely depends on the ability of the researcher (Patton, 2002).

Exercise

- A. Take the following text and paraphrase it, and add appropriate citations (in the manner of the *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*, 2001).

Thinking about design alternatives and methods choices leads directly to consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative data. The approach here is pragmatic. Some questions lend themselves to numerical answers; some don't. If you want to know how much people weigh, use a scale. If you want to know if they're obese, measure body fat in relation to height and weight and compare the results to population norms. If you want to know what their weight *means* to them, how it affects them, how they think about it, and what they do about it, you need to ask them questions, find out about their experiences, and hear their stories. A comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of weight in people's lives requires both their numbers and their stories. Doctors who look only at test results and don't also listen to their patients are making judgments with inadequate knowledge, and vice versa. (Patton, 2002, pp. 13-14, emphasis in the original)

1. In groups, take a phrase or sentence and use it in a quotation, word for word.
2. Also try to take the general ideas and summarize them in your own words.

In both cases, use appropriate citation, using APA format.

- B. Now take a passage of your choice and repeat 1. and 2. above.

References

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. (5th ed.) (2001). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.